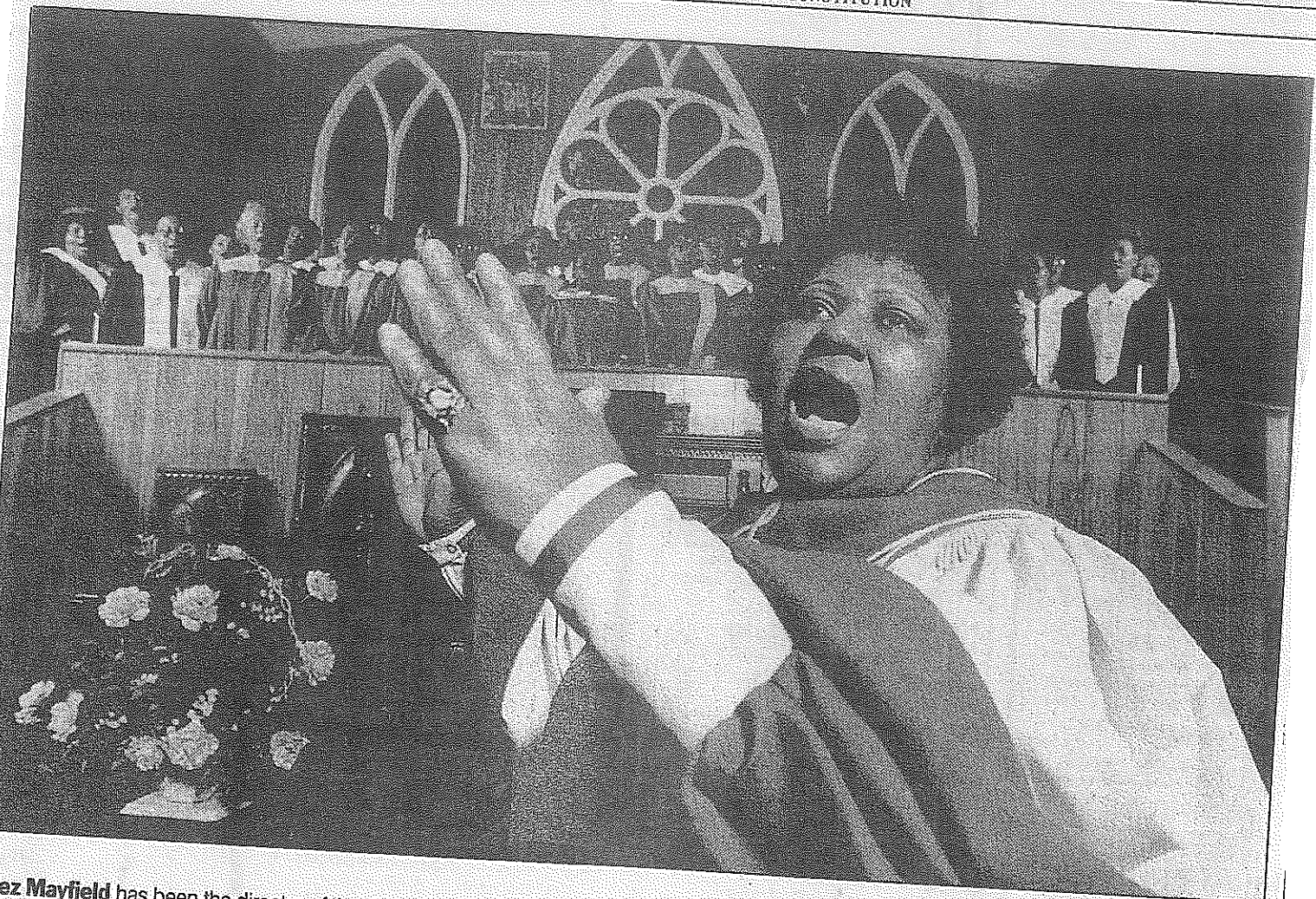


Religion

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says, "and I think that's what people feel when they walk in the door, and that's what carried over in the movie."

David Murray Jr./Special

Driven by 'Miss Daisy'

Scene in movie gives choir a chance to tour

By **Actor Cordell**
Staff writer

An appearance in the hit movie "Driving Miss Daisy" has put a Decatur church choir on the road.

Since singing for a funeral scene in the movie, which was nominated for nine Academy Awards, the choir of the Little Friendship Missionary Baptist Church has been invited to perform in six states.

The singers will hit the road in the church bus in April for the first of a series of spring and summer tours.

The pastor, the Rev. B.T. Moore Jr., said the 1,500-member church is a little overwhelmed from "going Hollywood." But that being the Lord's will, he said, it was no surprise that it was the church choir that cinched it.

"Our singing talent has always been basic to our ministry," the Rev. Moore said of the 50-year-old red-brick church at 315 Fifth Ave. in East Lake.

The choir's soulful rendition of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" in "Driving Miss Daisy" has also brought calls from many moviegoers asking how they can buy recordings of the choir's hymns.

They haven't made recordings, but the Rev. Moore said he's conferring with a couple of producers, and prospects look good for marketing tapes.

"We've always been a reserved kind of church, not drawing much attention from the outside, so we're going about this cautiously," he said.

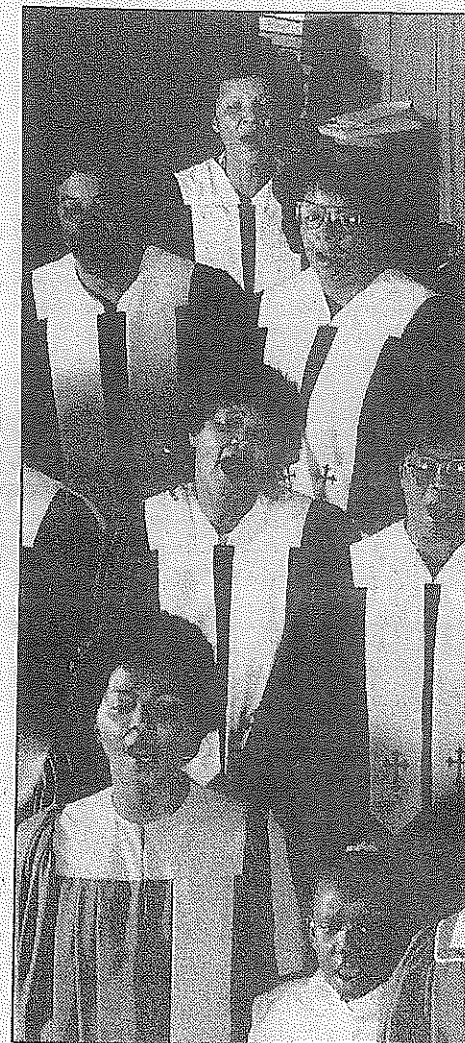
"It's amazing. Suddenly all these people are calling wanting to know all about us."

Inez Mayfield, Little Friendship's choir director for 35 years, is equally surprised.

"We're an old-fashioned, warm, family-type church and I think that's what people feel when they walk in the door, and that's what carried over in the movie," she said.

Little Friendship has five choirs, of different age categories, totaling about 200 people. Few choir members have had formal musical training.

Thirty were needed to form the choir



In "Driving Miss Daisy," choir members sang at the funeral for Daisy's maid, Idella.

was painful for church leaders, said Ms. Mayfield. "A lot of people got disappointed."

The soloist in the film, Indra Thomas, 20, a junior at Shorter College in Rome, has been singing since age 5 at Little Friendship, where her late father, E.T. Thomas, was pastor. With an assist from "Driving Miss Daisy," she's been invited to sing at a Patent Writers Association convention in Washington, D.C., on May 11.

The choir's first tour will culminate in the Rev. Moore's birthplace, Greenwood, Miss. It also happens to be the town where Morgan Freeman, who stars in the movie as Daisy Werthan's chauffeur, Hoke, grew up in the 1940s.

Because of the popularity of 'Driving Miss Daisy,' movie audiences nationwide have heard the Little Friendship Missionary Baptist Church choir.

July, he and Mr. Freeman met for the first time and shared their memories of Mississippi, said the Rev. Moore.

The movie's location scouts spotted Little Friendship while driving about Decatur looking for a church that hadn't changed much since the 1960s, said church business administrator James Bowens.

After director Bruce Beresford attended a Sunday service and chose the church and choir for the scene, he told church leaders that only minor changes would be made in church decor and members could select the hymn to be sung.

"We picked 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus' because it seemed fitting for the time the scene is set in — the civil rights movement in the '60s," said the Rev. Moore.

Some 60 church members served as extras for the funeral of Miss Daisy's maid, Idella, played by Esther Rolle. Appearing in the sequence were Jessica Tandy, as the crotchety Jewish widow whose resentment of Hoke turns into friendship, Mr. Freeman, Dan Aykroyd and Patti LuPone.

Ms. Rolle also was there, posing dead in the coffin. For Miss Rolle's stand-in, church member Mary Bell, spending an hour in the coffin wasn't too gruesome. "All of us in the church were just fascinated by what was going on," Ms. Bell said.

Regardless of what profits may come from choir concerts and recordings, the church has already benefited financially.

The Rev. Moore did not disclose figures but said all the singers and extras contributed earnings from their work in the film to the church.

It'll help them get started in the tour